

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes
FINAL
March 31, 2010, 7:30 p.m.
Chenery Middle School Community Room

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Becker, Dash, Epstein, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, McLaughlin, Millane, Paolillo, Smith; BOS Chair Leclerc; School Committee Chair Rittenburg

Town Administrator Younger, Town Accountant Hagg

Members Absent: Bruschi, Callanan, and Hofmann

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began by turning to the first item on the agenda. The WC, he said, is the advisory group to Town Meeting. The goal is to report on town-side programs. Last week, the WC voted on a split of available revenue. The town and schools will need to figure out how to deal with less money than they want to spend.

Subcommittee Reports (available revenue budget for town)

Culture and Recreation

Member Lynch, Chair of the Culture and Recreation subcommittee, began by reviewing the subcommittee's process and noted that the subcommittee focused on how the programs could run more efficiently. The subcommittee's key recommendation, he reported, is to combine Recreation, Health, and the Council on Aging (COA) into a single department with one department head. This would allow operating efficiencies and more effective management.

Member Becker reviewed the Health Department. She looked at where the regionalization process has taken them, e.g., emergency preparedness, toxic waste disposal, and the nursing position. She noted that there are other areas of consolidation to consider, such as animal control officer, weights and measures, and inspection. There are training and license costs that could be shared if these were regionalized.

Member Manjikian reviewed the COA. For the most part, the COA has not provided data requested by the committee. Where data has been provided, it is inconsistent, e.g., their data on the number of rides provided by the transportation program don't add up. Data on participants in any of the programs is still missing. While it is clear that their programs need support, key data is missing, which makes decision-making difficult. Curtis concurred, and added that numbers were not included in their executive summary. Member Lynch raised the need for fee-based programs with means testing.

Member Millane reported on the Recreation Department and noted that, while they cover their direct costs with fees, the Department of Public Works covers \$231K of their overall costs. The rink and pool are run-down facilities. If funding to repair these facilities cannot be found within the town budget, privatization should be explored as an option.

Member Allison reviewed the Library's five components: Adult, Young Adult, Childrens, Circulation, and Technology. She observed that the most common concern was not a programmatic issue but rather residents' desire to see the Library's hours better aligned with the availability and preference of the community. In the Adult category, librarians spend their time doing reference work and in acquisition of materials and deciding which books are appropriate, etc. Since many comparable communities are also doing this type of acquisitions research, efforts could be combined here. She also noted that Circulation (checking books out and in), which accounts for over 25% of the Library's budget, was still purely a manual operation, but one where IT should provide some economies. She also noted that there had been some "mission creep" at both the Library and the Senior Center, e.g., the decision to provide computer access for people to do their email – at the town's expense.

Town Administrator Younger noted that he has tried to coordinate book purchases with other towns and has tried to coordinate weekend hours with other libraries in the community, as well. Younger added that combining departments is not a new idea but that some of these suggestions will require bylaw changes, and/or state law changes, as Belmont does not have a charter. Chair Curtis asked if these suggestions should be quantified, e.g., consolidation of three departments under one department head. The available revenue budget requires staffing decisions, he said, so adding numbers would be very helpful and is encouraged.

Public Safety

Member Paolillo, Chair of Public Safety, distributed a handout and reviewed five programs that fall under the Police Department: patrol services, traffic, detectives, community services, and public safety communications. Belmont will receive a 5% state reimbursement this year under the Quinn Bill, as opposed to 50% in past years. The budget is \$6,372,913, which is a 4.2 % increase from last year and amounts to 7.2% of the overall budget. Patrol Services is the largest component of the budget, with traffic management next. Calls for services are stable from year to year (around 18,000) and crime is down overall. Analyzing the trend data helps with resource allocation.

Areas for structural change (or potential cost savings) include:

- eliminating the DARE officer, which would save \$65K (perhaps private funding is an option with DARE)
- eliminating the SRO position, which would save \$30K
- eliminating the Quinn Bill payments which would save approximately \$490K (but there are legal and bargaining issues)

- regionalizing 911, which might generate cost savings and would be required as the first step toward regionalization of fire suppression services.

Chair Curtis asked: what do auxiliary officers do? They provide assistance at flu clinics and supplement officers at community events. He also noted that if DARE and the SRO positions were eliminated, a Lieutenant position could be eliminated as well.

Member Libenson noted that the Fire Department's programs pertain to: fire suppression, prevention, medical, and community services. Out of 3,000 calls received, only 9 were building fires. Clearly, the fire department is staffed for "the worst case scenario" which begs the question of regionalization of 911 calls and how do we go from thinking about it to actually doing it. Member Paolillo said that services will improve if regionalization takes place and that there is potential for significant savings on capital spending, e.g., ladder truck sharing. Member Libenson said he did discuss with the Fire Chief the issue of charging for false alarms. Member Paolillo noted that in Fire and Police, both wages are up and overtime is up. If more staff are on duty, he said, he would think that overtime would go down.

Public Works

Member Epstein reviewed Community Development and Building Services. Community Development generates about \$500K a year in permit revenue. They also conduct inspections and provide engineering and planning services to the town. This is all done with less than 6 FTEs, which seems lean and probably could not be realistically cut. Street paving is contracted out in a bidding process, and the contractors need supervision, which implies more staffing, not less. Planning has three FTEs and the town has undertaken the Comprehensive Plan so the role of planning should be reassessed once the Comprehensive Plan is in.

For the DPW, Member Epstein continued, there are a broad set of activities that they oversee, including: cemetery, vehicle maintenance, grounds maintenance, forestry, snow removal, yard waste, street maintenance, street lighting, solid waste, and water and sewer enterprise budgets. This is all done by 55 FTEs. There is an excessive number of senior staffing in the DPW, and this should be addressed. The DPW provides water pump-out services at no cost; yard-waste pickup costs the town about \$300K per year; \$50K is spent landscaping traffic islands; and trash collection costs about \$1.6M per year. One must ask whether fees could be charged for some of these services, and whether we could landscape in a less costly way. Pool and rink privatization could be explored, although those facilities are very run down. The utility billing is behind the times and still sending out paper bills many times a year.

The fleet of vehicles costs about \$500K a year to maintain. One recommendation would be to issue an RFP to see whether an outside company could do maintenance. He noted that this might be difficult given the variety of vehicles and the required hours of availability.

Building Services is a small department, and is responsible for maintaining Town Hall, the Homer Building, all Fire and Police stations, and the Beech Street Center, and overseeing Benton and the former Light Building – all with four FTEs. It may be reasonable to consolidate with schools, as it is so small a department. Town Hall is expensive to operate and is underutilized. Departments in Town Hall could be moved to other spaces in town.

General Government

Member Millane, Chair of General Government, noted that within these seven departments, there is a small number of FTEs. There could be some cost savings in payroll and bill paying, if the departments become more electronic and therefore more efficient. In Accounting, the department is looking to hire a part-time budget analyzer who will take program budgeting to the next level. It has been recommended that the accounting department go to the EFT system for payments and to reduce costs overall. Member Epstein added that one third of all checks are paper checks and not direct deposit. Taxes too are paper invoices. Water, sewer, motor vehicle, and the light department are also sending out paper bills. This could all be done online. The Treasurer department's postage bill is \$26K a year. IT is a lean department, Epstein said, with 5 FTEs, which is below average for comparable communities.

Member Dash reported on Human Resources and said that activity indicators were reviewed as well as their programs. In the Town Administrator's office, there has been a drop in legal fees, which could be related to better insurance coverage. Town Meeting costs have gone up 50%.

Member McLaughlin reported on the Assessors and Town Clerk. The Assessors need to be fair and collect the property taxes that are due to the town. Belmont's Assessors do an excellent job. The Town Clerk's office ought to be more electronic and, if so, it could be much more efficient.

Chair Curtis thanked those who reported for excellent reports. He noted that next week's WC meeting will be devoted to the Warrant review. He said the meeting on April 14th is a joint meeting of the WC, SC, and BOS, and available-funds budgets will be presented. He added that, while the WC is almost done with its Program analysis, more actual numbers are needed.

Override Analysis (Member Libenson)

Member Libenson reviewed his Override Analysis handout. There are four override categories: 1. single issue 2. line item 3. town/school 4. "tiered" or pyramid (small, med and large). There were 619 elections, with 1186 votes. The results are overall very close: 51% passed and 49% failed. Member Libenson reviewed the data in detail. Chair Curtis noted that Belmont has done single-issue overrides in the past and would most likely continue to do so this year as well. SC Chair Rittenburg noted that the Board

of Selectmen will need to decide if this is a single-year override versus a multi-year process – especially given what FY2012 will bring.

Chair Curtis reviewed the budget calendar and noted that budgets are due on May 5 to TM members – if, that is, Article 18 is approved on April 26.

Format of Subcommittee Reports

Chair Curtis asked Member Allison to review the format for subcommittee reports. He said he would like the reports to be built around the available-revenue number. Section 6 should illuminate what would be restored if an override passes (proposed adds).

Member Allison noted that Table 1.1 captures all of the spending that is happening in a department. She highlighted three concepts to keep in mind when reviewing the budgets:

- Programs are the department's responsibilities, e.g., fire prevention or fire suppression.
- Activity indicators are measures of output, such as the number of streets plowed, the number of books circulated, etc. (some departments have not provided any activity indicators for their key programs, and developing indicators for all program elements will be a priority for next year).
- Performance indicators speak to how well we are doing the things we are doing. Only a few departments have developed performance indicators and this will be a priority for next year. She noted that, in some cases (e.g., snowplowing), the activity indicators may be similar to the performance indicators but with a time dimension, e.g., x miles of roads plowed with y hours.

Chair Curtis noted that he will want the subcommittee reports to be presented in a uniform way, and that he will be providing templates. Specific due dates will be decided soon.

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:46 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary